CHAPTER FIVE

Letter from J. J. Rousseau to M. de Voltaire

August 18, 1756

Your last Poems, Sir, have reached me in my solitude;[1] and although all my friends know the love I have for your writings, I do not know from which side these could have come to me, unless it be from your own. I have found pleasure in them along with instruction, and recognized the hand of the master; and I believe I owe you thanks for the copy as well as for the work. I shall not tell you that everything about them appears equally good to me; but the things that displease me there only impose more confidence on me for those which carry me away. It is not without difficulty that I sometimes defend my reason against the charms of your Poetry; but in order to render my admiration more worthy of your works I exert myself not to admire everything in them.

I shall do more, sir; I shall tell you without evasion, not the beauties that I believed I felt in these two poems, the task would unnerve my laziness, nor even the defects that will be noticed in them by abler people than I, but the displeasures which disturb at this moment the taste that I take to your lessons; and I shall tell them to you still touched by a first reading in which my heart listened avidly to yours, loving you as my brother, honoring you as my Master, flattering myself finally that you will recognize in my intentions the candor of an upright soul, and in my speech the tone of a friend of the truth who speaks to a Philosopher. Besides, the more your second poem enchants me, the more I freely take part against the first; for if you have not feared opposing yourself, why would I fear to be of your opinion? I must believe that you are not much attached to sentiments that you refute so well.

All my grievances are then against your poem on the disaster of Lisbon, because I expected from it some effects more worthy of the

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humanity which appears to have inspired you to write it. You reproach Pope and Leibniz for insulting our misfortunes, by maintaining that everything[2] is good,[3] and you so amplify the tableau of our miseries that you aggravate the sentiment of them: instead of the consolations for which I hoped, you only cause me to be afflicted. One might say that you fear that I do not see well enough how unhappy I am; and it seems you expect to tranquilize me a good deal by proving to me that everything is bad.

Do not deceive yourself on this, Sir; it happens entirely to the contrary of what you intend. This optimism that you find so cruel consoles me nevertheless in the very sufferings that you depict to me as intolerable.

Pope's poem sweetens my ills and leads me to patience; yours embitters my pains, invites me to grumbling, and depriving me of everything beyond a shaken hope, it reduces me to despair. In this strange opposition which reigns between what you establish and what I experience, calm the perplexity which agitates me, and tell me, which is abused, feeling or reason? "Man have patience," Pope and Leibniz tell me. "Your ills are a necessary effect of your nature, and of the constitution of this universe. The eternal and beneficent Being who governs you would have liked to safeguard you from them. Of all the economies possible, he has chosen the one which combined the least bad with the most good, or (to say the same thing more crudely, if it is necessary) if he has not done better, it is because he could not do better."

What does your poem now tell me? "Suffer forever, wretches. If there is a God who has created you, no doubt he is all-powerful; he could have prevented all your ills: do not hope then that they will ever end; for one could not see why you exist, if it is not to suffer and to die."[4] I do not know what such a doctrine could have that is more consoling than optimism and even fatalism. As for me, I acknowledge it appears to me even crueler than Manichaeism. If perplexity concerning the origin of evil forces you to alter one of the perfections of God, why do you wish to justify his power at the expense of his goodness? If it is necessary to choose between two errors, I like the first one still better.

You do not wish, Sir, that your work be regarded as a poem against Providence; and I shall indeed restrain myself from giving it this name, although you have characterized as a book against the human race a writing wherein I pleaded the cause of the human race against itself.[5] I know the distinction that must be made between an author's intentions, and the consequences that can be drawn from his doctrine. The just defense of myself obliges me only to have you observe, that in depicting human miseries, my purpose was excusable, and even praiseworthy, as I believe,

for I showed men how they caused their miseries themselves, and consequently how they might avoid them.

I do not see that one can seek the source of moral evil other than in the free man, perfected, hence corrupted; and as for physical ills, if sensitive and imperturbable matter is a contradiction, as it seems to me, they are inevitable in any system of which man is a part; and then the question is not at all why is man not perfectly happy, but why does he exist? Moreover, I believe I have shown that with the exception of death, which is an evil almost solely because of the preparations which one makes preceding it, most of our physical ills are still our own work. Without departing from your subject of Lisbon, admit, for example, that nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six to seven stories there, and that if the inhabitants of this great city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less, and perhaps of no account. All would have fled at the first disturbance, and the next day they would have been seen twenty leagues from there, as gay as if nothing had happened; but it is necessary to remain, to be obstinate around some hovels, to expose oneself to new quakes, because what one leaves behind is worth more than what one can bring along. How many unfortunate people have perished in this disaster because of one wanting to take his clothes, another his papers, another his money? Is it not known that the person of each man has become the least part of himself, and that it is almost not worth the trouble of saving it when one has lost all the rest?

You would have wished (and who would not have wished the same) that the quake had occurred in the midst of a wilderness rather than in Lisbon. Can one doubt that such also do take place in the wildernesses? But we do not speak of them, because they do not cause any harm to the Gentlemen of the Cities, the only men of whom we take account; they even cause little harm to the animals and Savages who dwell scattered in isolated places, and who fear neither the collapse of roofs, nor the conflagration of houses. But what does such a privilege signify? Should it be said then that the order of the world ought to change according to our whims, that nature ought to be subjected to our laws, and that in order to disallow it an earthquake in some place, we have only to build a City there?

There are some events which often strike us more or less according to the appearances under which one considers them, and which lose much of the horror that they inspire at first glance, when one wants to examine them more closely. I learned in *Zadig*, and nature confirms for me from day to day, that an early death is not always a real evil, and that it

can sometimes pass for a relative good.[6] Of so many men crushed under the ruins of Lisbon, several, undoubtedly, have evaded some greater misfortunes; and, despite what is touching in such a description, and what it furnishes to poetry, it is not certain, that a single one of these unfortunates has suffered more than if, in accordance with the ordinary course of things, he had awaited in drawn-out anguish the death which overtook him by surprise. Is there a sadder end than that of a dying man whom one overburdens with useless cares, whose solicitor and heirs do not permit him to breathe, whose Doctors leisurely assassinate him in his bed, and whose barbarous Priests artfully cause to savor death?[7] As for me, I see everywhere that the ills to which nature subjects us are far less cruel than those we add to them.

But, however ingenious we may be in fomenting our misfortunes by dint of fine institutions, we have not been able, up to the present, to perfect ourselves to the point of generally rendering life a burden to ourselves and of preferring nothingness to our existence; without which preference, discouragement, and despair would soon have taken hold of the greatest number, and the human race could not have long subsisted. But if it is better for us to be than not to be, this would be enough to justify our existence, even though we would have no compensation to expect for the ills that we have to suffer, and though these ills were as great as you depict them. But on this subject it is difficult to find any good faith among men, and any good calculations among Philosophers; because the latter in comparing the good and the bad always forget the sweet sentiment of existence, independent of any other sensation, and because the vanity of scorning death moves the others to calumniate life; almost like these women who, with a stained dress and some scissors claim to prefer holes to stains.

You think along with Erasmus that few people would want to be reborn in the same conditions in which they have lived;[8] but such a one estimates his merchandise quite highly who would greatly reduce it, if he had some hope of concluding the sale. Besides, Sir, whom should I believe that you have consulted on that. Some rich people, perhaps, sated by false pleasures, but not knowing genuine ones, always bored with life and always trembling over losing it; perhaps some literary people, of all the orders of men the most sedentary, the most unhealthy, the most reflective, and consequently the most unhappy. Do you want to find some men of better composition, or at least commonly more sincere, and who, forming the greatest number, at least because of that ought to be heard by preference? Consult an honest *bourgeois* who will have spent an obscure and tranquil life without projects and without ambition; a

good artisan, who lives commodiously by his trade; even a peasant, not from France, where it is claimed that it is necessary to cause them to die of misery, in order for them to enable us to live, but of the country, for example, where you are, and generally of any free country.[9] In fact I dare to state that perhaps there is in the upper Valais not a single Mountaineer discontented with his almost robotic life, and who would not willingly accept, even in place of Paradise, the bargain of being reborn unceasingly in order to vegetate thus perpetually. These differences cause me to believe that it is often the abuse we make of life which renders it a burden to us; and I have a far less favorable opinion of those who are vexed at having lived than of those who can say with Cato: *Nec me vixisse poenitet, quoniam ita vixi, ut frustrà me natum non existimem.*[10] This does not mean that the Wise man might not decamp voluntarily without a murmur and without despair, when nature or fortune very clearly brings him the order to depart. But according to the ordinary course of things, with whatever ills might be sown over human life, it is all things considered not a bad present; and if it is not always a bad thing to die, it is quite rarely so to live.

Our different manners of thinking on all these matters teach me why several of your proofs are hardly conclusive for me. For I am not unaware how much more readily human reason grasps the mold of our opinions than that of the truth, and that between two men of contrary opinion, what the one believes demonstrated is often only a sophism for the other. When you attack, for example, the chain of beings so well described by Pope, you say that it is not true that, if one removed an atom from the world, the world could not subsist.[11] You cite thereon Mr. de Crouzas; then you add that nature is not subject to any precise measure nor to any precise form; that no planet is moved in an absolutely regular orbit; that no known being is of a precisely mathematical form; that no precise quantity is required for any operation; that nature never acts rigorously; that therefore one has no reason to assert that one atom less on Earth would be the cause of the Earth's destruction. I admit to you that concerning all this, Sir, I am more struck by the force of the assertion than by that of the reasoning, and that on this occasion, I would cede with more confidence to your authority than to your proofs.

With respect to Mr. de Crouzas, I have not read his writing against Pope, and perhaps I am in no position to understand it; but what is very certain is that I shall not grant to him what I shall have disputed with you, and that I have quite as little faith in his proofs as in his authority. Far from thinking that nature is not subject to the precision of quantities and of forms, I would believe quite to the contrary that it alone strictly

follows this precision, because it alone knows how to compare exactly the ends and the means, and to measure the force by the resistance. As for these pretended irregularities, can it be doubted that they all have their physical cause, and does it suffice not to perceive it in order to deny that it exists? These apparent irregularities come no doubt from some laws unknown to us and that nature follows quite as faithfully as those which are known to us; from some agent that we do not perceive, and whose hindrance or cooperation has fixed measures in all its operations: otherwise it would be necessary to say distinctly that there are actions without a principle and effects without a cause; which is repugnant to all philosophy.

Let us assume two weights in equilibrium, and nevertheless unequal; to the smallest let the quantity be added which is the difference between them: either the two weights will still remain in equilibrium, and we shall have a cause without effect; or the equilibrium will be broken, and we shall have an effect without cause. But if the weights were of iron, and there were a particle of magnet hidden under one of the two, the precision of nature would then remove from it the appearance of precision, and by virtue of exactitude it would seem to lack it. There is not a form, not an operation, not a law in the physical world to which one could not apply some example similar to the one which I just proposed for weight.

You say that no known being is of a precisely mathematical form; I ask you, Sir, if there is some form possible which is not, and if the most bizarre curve is not as regular in the eyes of nature as a perfect circle is to ours. I imagine moreover that, if some body could have this apparent regularity, it would only be the universe itself, supposing it full and limited; for mathematical forms, being only abstractions, only have relations to themselves; whereas all those of natural bodies are relative to other bodies, and to any movements which modify them: therefore that would still not prove anything against the precision of nature, even if we were in agreement over what you understand by this word *precision*.

You distinguish events that have effects from those which have none. I doubt that this distinction is sound. Every event seems to me necessarily to have some effect, whether moral or physical, or composed of the two, but which are not always perceived, because the connection of events is even more difficult to follow than that of men; as in general one ought not to look for effects more considerable than the events which produce them, the smallness of causes often renders the examination ridiculous, even though the effects might be certain, and often several almost imperceptible effects also unite to produce a considerable event. Add that such an effect does not fail to occur, although it acts outside

of the body which produces it. Thus, the dust that a carriage raises can do nothing to the operation of the vehicle and to influence that of the world; but as there is nothing foreign to the universe, everything which happens there, acts necessarily on the universe itself.[12] Therefore, Sir, your examples appear to me more ingenious than convincing; I see a thousand plausible reasons why it would perhaps not be indifferent to Europe that on a certain day the heiress of Burgundy might be well or badly coiffured; nor to the destiny of Rome, that Caesar might have turned his eyes to the right or to the left, and spat from one or the other side, while going to the Senate the day he was punished there.[13] In a word, in reminding me of the grain of sand cited by Pascal, I am in several respects of the opinion of your Brahman;[14] and in whatever manner one envisages things, if all events do not have palpable effects, it seems to me incontestable that all have real ones, of which the human mind easily loses the thread, but which are never confused by nature.

You say it is demonstrated that the celestial bodies make their revolution in nonresistant space. It was surely a beautiful thing to demonstrate; but according to the custom of the ignorant, I have very little faith in demonstrations which go beyond my range.[15] I would imagine that in order to build up this one, one must just about have reasoned in this manner:

A certain force acting according to a certain law ought to give to the Stars a certain motion in a nonresistant environment; but the Stars have exactly the calculated motion; therefore there is no resistance. But who can know if there are not perhaps a million other possible laws, without counting the genuine one, according to which the same motions would be explained still better in a fluid, than in a vacuum by this one?[16] Has not the abhorrence of a vacuum for a long time explained most of the effects that have since been attributed to the action of air? Other experiments having since destroyed the abhorrence of the vacuum, has everything not been found filled? Has the vacuum not been reestablished on new calculations? Who will reply to us that a still more exact system will not destroy it over again? Let us leave aside the innumerable difficulties that a Physicist would perhaps construct on the nature of light and of illuminated spaces; but do you in good faith believe that Bayle, whose wisdom and caution in matters of opinion I, like you, admire, would have found your own opinion so demonstrated?[17] In general it seems that the Skeptics forget themselves a little as soon as they take up the dogmatic tone, and that they ought to use the term *to demonstrate* more soberly than anyone. What are the means of being believed, when one boasts about knowing nothing, while affirming so many things?

As for the rest, you have made a very fitting correction to Pope's system, by observing that there is no proportional gradation between the creatures and the Creator, and that, if the chain of created beings ends with God, it is because he holds it, and not because he terminates it.[18]

On the good of the whole, preferable to that of its part, you have man say: "I ought to be as dear to my master, I, a thinking and feeling being, as the planets which probably do not feel at all."[19] Undoubtedly this material universe ought not to be dearer to its Author than a single thinking and feeling being. But the system of this universe which produces, conserves, and perpetuates all the thinking and feeling beings ought to be dearer to him than a single one of these beings; he can therefore, despite his goodness, or rather by his very goodness, sacrifice something of the happiness of individuals to the conservation of the whole. I believe, I hope, I am worth more in the eyes of God than the earth of a planet; but if the planets are inhabited, as is probable, why would I be worth more in his eyes than all the inhabitants of Saturn? One has nicely turned these ideas to ridicule; it is certain that all the analogies are for this population, and that it is only human pride which might be against it. But this population being assumed, the conservation of the universe seems to have, for God himself, a morality which is multiplied by the number of the inhabited worlds.

That the corpse of a man feeds some worms, some wolves, or some plants is not, I admit, a compensation for the death of this man;[20] but if, in the system of the universe, it is necessary for the conservation of the human race that there be a circulation of substance among men, animals, and vegetation, then the particular ill of an individual contributes to the general good. I die, I am eaten by worms; but my children, my brothers will live as I have lived, and I do, by the order of nature, for all men, what Codrus, Curtius, the Decii, the Philaeni, and a thousand others did voluntarily for a small part of men.[21]

To return, Sir, to the system that you attack, I believe that one cannot examine it suitably, without distinguishing carefully the particular evil whose existence no Philosopher has ever denied, from the general evil that the optimist denies. It is not a question of knowing if each one of us suffers or not; but if it were good that the universe has existed, and if our ills were inevitable in the constitution of the universe. Thus the addition of an article would render, it seems, the proposition more exact; and in place of *All is good*,[22] it would perhaps be worth more to say: *The whole is good*, or *All is good for the whole*. Then it is quite evident that no man would be able to give direct proofs either for or against; for these proofs depend on a perfect knowledge of the constitution of the world

and of the purpose of its Author, and this knowledge is incontestably beyond human intelligence. The true principles of optimism can be drawn neither from the properties of matter, nor from the mechanics of the universe, but only by induction from the perfections of God who presides over all;[23] in such a way that one does not prove the existence of God by the system of Pope, but the system of Pope by the existence of God, and it is incontestable that from the question of Providence is derived that of the origin of evil. But if these two questions have not been better treated, the one before the other, it is because one has always reasoned so badly on Providence that the absurd things that have been said about it have gravely confused all the corollaries that could be drawn from this great and consoling dogma.

The first who spoiled the cause of God are the Priests and the Devout, who do not suffer anything to occur according to the established order, but always have Divine justice intervene in purely natural events, and in order to be sure of their facts, punish and chastise the wicked, put to the proof or requite the good indiscriminately with benefits or misfortunes, according to the event. For myself, I do not know if it is a good Theology; but I find it a bad manner of reasoning, to base the proofs of Providence indiscriminately on the *pros* and *cons,* and to attribute to it unselectively everything which would equally occur without it.

The Philosophers, in their turn, hardly seem to me to be more reasonable, when I see them blame Heaven that they are not insensitive, shout that all is lost when they have a toothache, or that they are poor, or that they have been robbed, and charge God, as Seneca says, to watch over their valise.[24] If some tragic accident had caused Cartouche or Caesar to perish in their infancy, one would have said: What crimes had they committed? These two brigands lived, and we say: Why were they allowed to live?[25] In contrast the devout person will say in the first instance: God wanted to punish the father by taking his son from him; and in the second: God preserved the child for the chastisement of the people. Thus, whatever part nature might have taken, Providence is always right among the Devout and always wrong among the Philosophers. Perhaps in the order of human things it is neither wrong nor right, because everything keeps to the law that is common, and because there is no exception for anyone. It is to be believed that particular events are nothing here below in the eyes of the Master of the universe, that his Providence is only universal, that he is content to preserve the genera and the species, and to preside over the whole without being disturbed by the manner in which each individual spends this brief life. Does a wise King who desires that everyone live happily in his States have to inform himself whether the

taverns are good there? The passerby grumbles one night when they are bad, and laughs the rest of his days at such an unbecoming impatience. *Commorandi enim Natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi dedit.*[26]

To think rightly in this respect, it seems that things ought to be considered relatively in the physical order, and absolutely in the moral order: with the result that the greatest idea that I might give myself of Providence is that each material being be disposed the best way possible in relation to the whole, and each intelligent and sensitive being the best way possible in relation to himself; which signifies in other terms that for whoever senses his existence, it is worth more to exist than not to exist.[27] But it is necessary to apply this rule to the total duration of each sensitive being, and not to several particular instances of its duration, such as human life; which shows how much the question of Providence depends on that of the immortality of the soul that I have the good fortune to believe, without being unaware that reason can doubt it, and on that of the eternity of punishments, which neither you nor I, nor ever a man thinking well of God, will ever believe.

If I bring these different questions back to their common principle, it seems to me that they are all related to that of God's existence. If God exists, he is perfect; if he is perfect, he is wise, powerful, and just; if he is wise and powerful, all is good; if he is just and powerful, my soul is immortal; if my soul is immortal, thirty years of life are nothing for me, and are perhaps necessary for the maintenance of the universe. If one grants me the first proposition, never will one shake those following; if one denies it, it is not necessary to dispute over its consequences.

Neither of us is in this last case. So far at least am I from being able to presume anything of the like on your part in reading the collection of your works, most of them offer me the greatest, most gentle, most consoling ideas of the Divinity, and I much prefer a Christian after your fashion than after that of the Sorbonne.[28]

As for me, I naively admit to you that neither the pro nor the con seems to me demonstrated on this point by the lights of reason, and that if the Theist bases his sentiments only on probabilities, the Atheist, even less precise, seems to me only to base his own on some contrary possibilities. Moreover, the objections, on both sides, are always insoluble because they turn on things of which men have no genuine idea at all.[29] I agree to all that, and yet I believe in God quite as strongly as I believe in any other truth, because to believe and not to believe are the things which depend the least on me, because the state of doubt is a state too violent for my soul, because when my reason drifts, my faith cannot for long remain suspended, and is determined without it, and finally because

a thousand subjects of preference attract me from the most consoling side and join the weight of hope to the equilibrium of reason.

[I recall that what struck me the most forcefully in all my life, concerning the fortuitous arrangement of the universe, is the twenty-first philosophical thought, where is shown by the laws of analysis of chance that when the quantity of the throws is infinite, the difficulty of the occurrence is more than sufficiently compensated by the multiplicity of throws, and that consequently the mind ought to be more astonished by the hypothetical continuation of chaos than by the real birth of the universe.[30] —This is, while assuming motion necessary, what one has never said with more force to my liking concerning this dispute; and, as for me, I declare that I do not know the least response that common sense might have, whether true, or false, if not to deny as false what one cannot know, that motion is essential to matter.[31] From another perspective, I do not know whether materialism has ever explained the generation of organic bodies and the perpetuity of seeds; but there is this difference between these two opposed positions, that, while both the one and the other seem equally convincing to me, the last alone persuades me. As for the first, let someone come to tell me that, from a fortuitous throw of letters the *Henriade* was composed, I would deny it without hesitating; it is more possible for chance to bring it about than for my mind to believe it, and I feel that there is a point where moral impossibilities are for me equivalent to a physical certainty. One will have to speak finely to me about the eternity of time; I have not traversed it; about the infinity of the throws; I have not counted them; and my incredulity, quite as little philosophical as one will like, will triumph thereon over the demonstration itself. I do not deny that what I call on that matter a *proof of sentiment* is called *prejudice;* and I do not give this obstinacy of belief as a model; but with a good faith perhaps without example, I give it as an invincible disposition of my soul, that nothing will ever be able to surmount, which up to now I have never regretted, and which one cannot attack without cruelty.][32]

There, then, is a truth from which we both depart, in support of which you sense how easy optimism is to defend and Providence to justify, and it is not to you that it is necessary to repeat the trite but solid reasons which have been provided so often on this subject.[33] With regard to the Philosophers who do not acknowledge the principle, one should not dispute with them on these matters, because what is only a proof of sentiment for us cannot become a demonstration for them, and because it is not a reasonable speech to say to a man: You ought to believe this, because I believe it. They, on their part, ought not to dispute with us on

these same matters, because these are only corollaries of the principal proposition that a decent adversary hardly dares oppose to them, and because in their turn they would be wrong to require that one should have proved to them the corollary independently of the proposition which serves as its base. I think they ought not to do it, for still another reason. It is that there is some inhumanity in troubling peaceful souls, and in afflicting men to no purpose, when what one wishes to teach them is neither certain nor useful. I think, in a word, that following your example, one cannot attack too strongly the superstition which troubles society, nor respect too much the Religion that sustains it.

But I am indignant, like you, that the faith of everyone is not in the most perfect liberty, and that man dares control the interior of consciences where he is unable to penetrate; as if it depended on us to believe or not to believe in matters where demonstration has no place, and that one might ever subject reason to authority. The Kings of this world, have they therefore any inspection in the other? And do they have the right to torment their Subjects here below in order to force them to go to Paradise? No; all human Government is limited by its nature to civil duties; and whatever the Sophist Hobbes might have been able to say on this, when a man serves the State well, he owes an account to no one concerning the manner in which he serves God.[34]

I do not know if this just Being will not one day punish every tyranny exercised in his name; I am quite sure, at least, that he will not share in it, and will refuse eternal happiness to no virtuous unbeliever of good faith. Can I, without offending his goodness and even his justice doubt that an upright heart redeems an involuntary error, and that irreproachable morals are well worth a thousand bizarre creeds prescribed by men, and rejected by reason? I shall say more; if I could, at my choice, buy good works at the price of my faith, and compensate by dint of virtue my supposed incredulity, I would not hesitate an instant, and I would rather be able to say to God: I have done, without thinking of thee, the good which is pleasing to thee, and my heart followed thy will without knowing it; than to say to him, as I must do one day: Alas! I loved thee and have not ceased to offend thee; I have known thee, and have done nothing to please thee.

There is, I admit, a sort of profession of faith that the laws can impose; but beyond the principles of morality and natural right, it ought to be purely negative, because there can exist Religions which attack the foundation of society, and because it is necessary to begin by exterminating these Religions in order to assure the peace of the State. Of these dogmas to proscribe, intolerance is easily the most odious; but it is necessary

to catch it at its source; for the most sanguinary Fanatics change their language according to fortune, and preach only patience and gentleness when they are not the strongest. Therefore I call intolerant by principles any man who imagines that one cannot be a good man without believing everything that he believes, and damns unpityingly all those who do not think like him. Indeed, the faithful are rarely of a humor to leave reprobates in peace in this world; and a Saint who thinks he lives among the damned willingly takes up in advance the business of the devil. Yet if there were some intolerant unbelievers who wished to force the people to believe nothing, I would banish them no less severely than those who wish to force the people to believe everything which pleases them.

I would therefore wish that in each State one might have a moral code, or a sort of civil profession of faith, which contained positively the social maxims that everyone would be bound to admit, and negatively the fanatical maxims that one would be bound to reject, not as impious, but as seditious. Thus every Religion which could agree with the code would be allowed; every Religion which would not agree with it would be proscribed; and everyone would be free to have none other than the code itself. Done carefully, this work would, it seems to me, be the most useful book ever composed, and perhaps the only one necessary for men. There, Sir, is a subject for you. I passionately wish that you might want to undertake this work and adorn it with your Poetry in order that, everyone being able to learn it easily, it might from childhood bring into all hearts these feelings of gentleness and humanity, which shine in your writings, and which always lacked among the devout. I exhort you to meditate on this project, which ought to be pleasing at least to your soul.[35] You have given us in your *Poem on Natural Religion* the Catechism of man: give us now, in the one I propose to you, the Catechism of the Citizen.[36] This is a matter on which to meditate for a long time, and perhaps to reserve for the last of your works, in order to finish by a benefit to the human race the most brilliant career that a man of letters might ever have traversed.

I cannot refrain, Sir, from remarking in this regard a quite singular opposition between you and me about the subject of this letter. Surfeited with glory, and disabused of vain grandeurs, you live free in the bosom of abundance; quite sure of immortality, you philosophize peacefully on the nature of the soul; and if the body or the heart suffers, you have Tronchin for a doctor and for a friend: however, you find only evil on Earth. And I, obscure, poor, and tormented by an incurable malady, I meditate with pleasure in my retreat, and find that all is good.[37] From

whence might these apparent contradictions come? You yourself have explained it: you enjoy; but I hope, and hope embellishes all.[38]

I have as much difficulty in leaving this tiresome letter as you will have in finishing it. Pardon me, great man, for a zeal which is perhaps indiscreet, but which would not be vented with you, if I esteemed you less. God forbid that I would want to offend the one of my contemporaries whose talents I honor the most, and whose writings speak best to my heart; but it concerns the cause of Providence from which I expect all things. After having so long drawn consolations and courage from your lessons, it is hard for me that you should now remove all that from me, in order to offer me only an uncertain and vague hope, rather as a present palliative, than as a compensation to come. No: I have suffered too much in this life not to expect from it another. All the subtleties of Metaphysics will not make me doubt for a moment about the immortality of the soul and about a beneficent Providence. I sense it, I believe it, I want it, I hope it, I shall defend it until my last breath; and it will be, of all the disputations that I shall have supported, the only one where my interest will not be forgotten.

I am, Sir, etc.